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1972

A Seventeenth-Century  
Defender of Islam

Henry Stubbe  
(1632 - 76) and his Book

*by* P. M. Holt

*Price 30p.*

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LONDON WC1H 0AG



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## A Seventeenth-Century Defender of Islam Henry Stubbe (1632-76) and his Book

*Païen ont tort e crestiiën ont dreit*—‘Pagans are wrong and Christians are right.’ Thus the doomed hero, Roland, viewing the approach of the Saracens, succinctly expressed the opinion held of Muslims throughout a thousand years of Christendom.<sup>1</sup> It was an opinion which did not suddenly change with the ending of the Middle Ages and the disruption of the Western Church. As late as 1697, a book was published with this uncompromisingly explicit title: *The true nature of imposture fully display’d in the life of Mahomet: With a discourse annex’d for the vindication of Christianity from this charge. Offered to the consideration of the Deists of the present age.* The book was a best-seller. Two editions were called for in the year of publication, and it was frequently reprinted down to the nineteenth century. The author was Humphrey Prideaux of Westminster and Christ Church, canon and subsequently dean of Norwich.<sup>2</sup>

Very different was the history of a second work of the same period, which also announced its character in its title: *An account of the rise and progress of Mahometanism with the life of Mahomet and a vindication of him and his religion*

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<sup>1</sup> For the development of the traditional Christian view of Islam, see Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, 1960; R. W. Southern, *Western views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Mass., 1962; James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, Princeton, N.J., 1964. An earlier account, particularly of beliefs current in Tudor England, is given in Samuel C. Chew, *The crescent and the rose*, London, 1937, 386-451.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller account see P. M. Holt, ‘The treatment of Arab history by Prideaux, Ockley and Sale’ in Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (edd.), *Historians of the Middle East*, London, 1962, 290-302.

from the calumnies of the Christians.<sup>3</sup> Although the work was anonymous there seems no doubt that its author was another Westminster and Christ Church man. 'I have heard', wrote Humfrey Wanley, the antiquary and cataloguer of the Harleian Manuscripts, 'that the author was Dr. Henry Stubbs the Physician.'<sup>4</sup> 'Dr.', as we shall see, was a courtesy title, although Henry Stubbs, or Stubbe, certainly practised physic. His work achieved publication less speedily than did that of Dr. Prideaux: it was in fact not printed until 1911, when a group of subscribers, most of whom were Indian and Turkish Muslims, had it published in London. A second impression appeared at Lahore in 1954. During the period of nearly two centuries and a half between its writing and first publication, Stubbe's work was not entirely unknown. At least six manuscripts are known to have existed at the beginning of the nineteenth century—three of them, it is interesting to note, in the library of the Revd. John Disney, on whose significance in the history of English Unitarianism I do not here need to dilate. Disney's collection was dispersed on his death, and his manuscripts are now probably lost, but the British Museum has two complete manuscripts of Stubbe's work and fragments of a third.

Into the textual history and problems of the work, I do not propose now to enter, but taking the printed text as my basis, I wish to follow three lines of enquiry. First, who was Henry Stubbe? Secondly, what are the contents and character of the book? Thirdly, what is its place in the context of Christian writing on Islam and the Prophet?

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<sup>3</sup> Extant mss., B. M. Harl. MSS. 1876 (complete), 6189 (complete); Sloane MSS. 1709, 1786 (fragments). Printed edn., ed. Hafiz Mahmud Khan Shairani; London: Luzac, 1911; 2nd impression, Lahore: Orientalia, 1954. Footnote references are to the printed edn. and are indicated by *Mahometanism*, followed by the pagination of both the 1st and 2nd impressions.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from the *Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts* in the introduction to *Mahometanism*, vii (iv).

# I

Although Henry Stubbe is now almost forgotten, he was in his own time a man of some celebrity, indeed notoriety. Most of what is known about him comes from the biographical notice written by his contemporary and fellow-Oxonian, Anthony Wood, who calls him 'the most noted person of his age that these late times have produced'.<sup>5</sup> He was born on 28 February 1632 in Lincolnshire, the son of a Puritan clergyman, also named Henry Stubbe. In 1641 he entered Westminster School, then under the headmastership of Richard Busby. Busby has passed into folklore as a flogging headmaster, but he was in fact a remarkable teacher with an original outlook. Not only did he supervise the production of Latin, Greek and Hebrew grammars for the use of his pupils, but he introduced into the School the study of Arabic, for which he wrote his own grammar. This unusual feature of the curriculum may well have been the source of Stubbe's interest in the Arabs and Islam—although on the evidence of Stubbe's book he acquired but little competence in the language. Busby's promotion of Arabic, however, was both serious and sustained. On 13 May 1661, John Evelyn noted in his diary,

'I heard and saw such exercises at the election of scholars at Westminster School to be sent to the University in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic, in themes and extemporary verses, as wonderfully astonished me in such youths, with such readiness and wit, some of them not above twelve, or thirteen years of age.'<sup>6</sup>

Six years later, Edmund Castell, Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, wrote to Samuel Clarke, an Oxford colleague, enclosing

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, London, 1692, II, 412. There is an account of Stubbe by Thompson Cooper in the *Dictionary of national biography*, LV, 116–17; see also James Sutherland, *English literature of the late seventeenth century*, Oxford, 1969, 381–2, 570.

<sup>6</sup> John Evelyn, *Diary* (Everyman edn.) I, 357.

'som Papers from Dr. Busby, who presents his kind respects to you, desires the cast of your eye, and your most exact Censure, alteration, and emendation of the Hebr: Chaldee, Arabique etc: Papers, wch. he sends to you, as also that you would, with his service present them to Dr. Pococke . . . . Our Request is, that he also would be pleased to do the like with you, to read, censure, etc: with as much severity as may be.'<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Busby's Westminster boys were indeed favoured to have the three leading Arabic scholars in England as their external examiners!

Henry Stubbe's family was in severe financial difficulties when he entered Westminster. They had been living in Ireland, but at the outbreak of the rebellion there in 1641, Henry's mother fled with him to Liverpool and then to London. In the hard times that followed, she worked as a seamstress, while her son made a little money on the side by helping his schoolfellows with their exercises. Busby quickly noticed him as an outstanding pupil, and introduced him to the man who was to be his patron for twenty years—the younger Sir Henry Vane. At this time, Vane was rising into prominence as one of the politicians on the Parliamentary side. His decisive share in bringing about the death of Strafford is well known, and he was a figure of considerable importance throughout the Long Parliament, being found generally amongst those who were opposed to a settlement with the King. Inevitably Vane tended to associate with Cromwell, whose close friend he became. Vane, however, in spite of his brilliance as a political tactician, remained a man of awkward and meticulous principle, and this led to the celebrated scene when Cromwell, expelling the Rump in April 1653, was moved to 'crying out with a loud voice, "O Sir Henry Vane, Sir Henry Vane; the Lord deliver me from Sir Henry Vane!"'<sup>8</sup> Thereafter Vane lived in retirement (with

<sup>7</sup> Cambridge University Library, Mm.1.47 (Baker MSS., 36), 347.

<sup>8</sup> [Edmund Ludlow], *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, London, 1771, 193.

a spell of dentention, ironically at Carisbrooke, like Charles I) until the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658. A final period of political activity and influence ended with Lambert's expulsion of the Rump, a little over a year later. On the restoration of Charles II, Vane was excluded from the Act of Indemnity. A political trial was followed by his execution on Tower Hill on 14 June 1662.

This, however, still lay in the future in 1641, and Henry Stubbe might well have counted himself fortunate in obtaining Vane's patronage. He became a King's Scholar at Westminster, and in 1649 Vane obtained him a place at Christ Church. Oxford was passing through a difficult period when he went up. Academic life and undergraduate discipline had suffered from the Civil War, especially during the years from 1642 to 1646, when the Royalist headquarters had been in the city, and venerable dons, like John Aubrey's Dr. Kettell of Trinity, who were 'wont to be absolute in the colledge', were 'affronted and disrespected by rude soldiers'. The subsequent Parliamentary visitation, the imposition of the Covenant, and (after the King's death) of the Engagement 'to be true and faithful to the government established, without King or House of Peers', resulted in a series of religious and political purges, and the profound unsettlement of the university. But the academic community, both senior and junior, had its own militants, of whom Stubbe soon showed himself to be one:

*"'Twas I (saith he) that brought the Engagement down to Oxon (though I took it not being then an Undergraduat) and having got Dr. S. F. and Dr. R. to be turned out, I saved the remains of the Cavaliers of Ch. Ch. and Queens Coll, and gave them opportunities to live securely and educate others in their principles."*<sup>9</sup>

It is not surprising that Stubbe was not everywhere popular. Nevertheless, the times were on his side. The distinguished Independent theologian, Dr. John Owen, who was

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<sup>9</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, II, 412-13.

intruded into the deanery of Christ Church in 1651, secured Stubbe's appointment as second keeper of the Bodleian. This was in 1657, and it was probably during his three years' tenure of the post that Stubbe acquired his very considerable erudition. Like many more prominent men, however, he was undone by the great shifts in politics that ensued on the death of Cromwell. In March 1660, Dr. Owen was ejected from Christ Church deanery, to which his predecessor, Dr. Edward Reynolds, returned. Reynolds was no friend to Stubbe—he was indeed the 'Dr. R.' whom Stubbe claimed the credit for having turned out. Shortly before, a book had been published under the title *A Light shining out of darkness*, which gave expression to unseasonably extreme views on the universities and the clergy. Although anonymous, it was ascribed to Stubbe and was seized on by Reynolds as the pretext for expelling him from Christ Church and procuring his dismissal from the Bodleian.

The trial and execution of Sir Henry Vane completed his protégé's discomfiture. But, although Stubbe's palmiest days ended in 1660 (when he was still only 28), he showed a remarkable toughness and a power of recuperation. Unlike Vane, who was in his way a martyr to principle, Stubbe seems to have had no principles whatsoever. He had long been closely associated with Vane, and was regarded as a spokesman of his ideas. In the changed climate of the Restoration, however, Stubbe sought to disavow any personal commitment to the opinions ascribed to him. To quote again from Anthony Wood:

'But why our Author *Stubbe* did write so, he'll tell you 'twas to serve his Patron Sir *Hen. Vane*, and to express his gratitude to him, who relieved him when he was a child and after, and that because the quarrels and animosities grew high betwixt the Presbyterians and Sir *H. Vane's* friends, he sided therefore with him.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, II, 414.



To be fair to Stubbe, he was not ashamed to admit his obligations to Vane long after the latter's downfall. As late as 1670, he wrote, 'I am ashamed rather to have done so little, than that I have done so much for him that so frankly obliged a stranger, and a childe.'<sup>11</sup>

After being expelled from Christ Church, Stubbe began to practise as a physician at Stratford-on-Avon. At the Restoration he openly dissociated himself from his former opinions by taking the oath of allegiance and conforming to the Church of England. He was confirmed by George Morley, then bishop of Worcester and subsequently of Winchester, who was, like Stubbe, a Westminster and Christ Church man. Perhaps it was Morley's influence at court that produced for Stubbe a royal appointment as physician in Jamaica, where he lived from 1661 to 1665.

The last few years of his life, which he spent in England, were not free from controversy, although Stubbe now presented himself as the defender of tradition. His changed outlook at this period was demonstrated in his pamphlets against the Royal Society and its apologists—Thomas Sprat, Joseph Glanvill and Robert Boyle himself, to whom he wrote:

'... the *History* [i.e. Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*] subverts the protestant religion and church of England. I never did any thing more unwillingly than to enter upon divinity, though now the thirty-nine articles, and homilies, and the protestant religion, be the subject I defend against Popery and Socianism.'<sup>12</sup>

Stubbe's attack on experimental science and defence of traditional scholasticism is somewhat surprising, and is perhaps explained by Wood's comment:

'... he took pet against the *Royal Society* (for which before he had a great veneration) and being encouraged by Dr. *Jo. Fell*, no admirer of that *Society*, became in his Writings

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted from *Legends no histories* in Violet A. Rowe, *Sir Henry Vane the Younger*, London, 1970, 228, n.1.

<sup>12</sup> Stubbe to Boyle, 17 December 1669, in Thomas Birch (ed.), *The works of the Honourable Robert Boyle*, 2nd edn., London, 1772, I, xci.

an inveterate Enemy against it for several pretended reasons.<sup>13</sup>

Stubbe's last escapade in print (for which he was imprisoned) was in 1673, when he attacked the Duke of York's marriage to Mary of Modena. Throughout these years he kept up his medical practice, chiefly at Warwick, although he went to Bath during the season. On 12 July 1676, while on the way to Bristol, to visit a patient, he was drowned by mischance. He was buried in the Abbey Church at Bath, where, by a final irony, the funeral sermon was preached by his old adversary, Joseph Glanvill, the rector.

Wood's appreciation of Stubbe may fittingly serve both to conclude this account of his life and to introduce his book.

'He was a person of most admirable parts, had a most prodigious memory, tho his enemies would not acknowledge it, but said he read Indexes; was the most noted Latinist and Grecian of his age. . . . He was a singular Mathematician, and thoroughly read in all political matters, Councils, ecclesiastical and profane Histories. He had a voluble tongue, and was seldom known to hesitate, either in publick disputes or common discourse. His Voice was big and magisterial, and his mind was equal to it. He was of a high, generous nature, scorn'd money and riches, and the adorers of them. . . . But as he was so admirably well qualified with several sorts of Learning and a generous Spirit, so he was very unhappy in this, that he was extream rash and imprudent, and wanted common discretion to manage his parts. He was a very bold man, utter'd any thing that came into his mind, not only among his Companions, but in publick Coffey-houses, (of which he was a great frequenter) . . . He had a hot and restless head (his hair being carret-colour'd) and was ever ready to undergo any enterprise, which was the chief reason that macerated his body almost to a skeleton. He was also a person of no fix'd Principles, and whether he believed those things which every good Christian doth, 'tis not for me to resolve.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, II, 414.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, II, 414-15.

The suspicion of unorthodoxy or worse, at which Anthony Wood hints, is indeed borne out by the *Account of the rise and progress of Mahometanism*.

## II

To turn now from the writer to the book. Stubbe begins by speaking of the amazing extent of Islam—or, as he calls it, Mahometanism—which has outstripped the expansion of Christianity. ‘With this new religion,’ he says,

‘arose an Empire greater then any of the four so famed Monarchies, erected in a poor barren Countrey, hemm’d in between two great and potent Princes, one reigning over the Eastern Christians, the other over the Persians, & which very much augments the wonder, all this was accomplished in the compass of a very few years, by a Man of mean State, feircely opposed & slenderly befreinded.’<sup>15</sup>

In order to explain how this came about, he proceeds to examine the history of the early Church, from the time of Christ to that of Muḥammad. He speaks of the Messianic Expectation among the Jews and the coming of Christ. The Jewish diaspora provided favourable conditions for the rapid spread of Christian teaching, in which (in Stubbe’s opinion) the fundamental article was

‘that Jesus who was crucified was the Messiah, that he was risen again, & would return in Glory to restore Israel, & establish Truth and Peace throughout the Earth.’<sup>16</sup>

The predominance of Jewish Christians in the early Church is emphasized by Stubbe. As a corollary of this,

‘that they did never beleive Christ to be the natural Son of God, by eternal Generation, or any Tenet depending thereon, or prayed unto him, or beleived the Holy Ghost, or the Trinity of persons in one Deity, is as evident as ’tis that the Jews & they did expect no such Messiah, and

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<sup>15</sup> *Mahometanism*, 2 (2).

<sup>16</sup> *Mahometanism*, 11 (12).

the introducing such doctrines would have been capital among them as tending to Blasphemy and Polytheism.<sup>17</sup>

This disturbing application of historical method to accepted theology was followed by its equally disturbing extension to church order. Seeing in the early Christian churches the counterparts of Jewish synagogues, he concludes that

‘The whole Constitution of the primitive Church Government relates to the Jewish Synagogue, not to the Hierarchy. The Presbyters were not Preists, but Laymen set apart to their Office by imposition of hands, . . . nor was the name of Preist then heard of.’<sup>18</sup>

Baptism and the Eucharist are equally subjected to historical criticism, and Stubbe does not hesitate to ascribe a pagan origin to the sacraments and to other observances of the Church.

The christianization of the Roman Empire is described with a similar lack of enthusiasm. Constantine is shown as an earlier Cromwell or Henry VIII. He

‘made himself Emperor. Right he had none, being a Bastard, and not elected nor admitted by the Senate; his Sword was his Title, and success warranted it. . . . He subverted the power of the Senate, removed the seat of the Empire, alter’d much of the Religion, and gain’d most of the Sacerdotal lands and revenues by the change.’<sup>19</sup>

As he brings his story down to the seventh century and the time of the Prophet, Stubbe paints an increasingly melancholy picture. The Church was contaminated by its borrowings from paganism, divided into sects, and a prey to fanaticism and obscurantism. The Emperors were Christian only in name, while the Empire was racked by internal instability and external war. Whatever the deficiencies of Stubbe’s historical scholarship, his presentation of the first six centuries of

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<sup>17</sup> *Mahometanism*, 15–16 (16).

<sup>18</sup> *Mahometanism*, 18–19 (20).

<sup>19</sup> *Mahometanism*, 35 (37).



Christian history is astonishingly distant from the providential interpretation offered by orthodox historians of his own and subsequent times, and in the second chapter of his book, he is at pains to defend his method and justify his account.

The third chapter broaches the main subject of the book in offering 'a breif account of Arabia and the Saracens'. Here Stubbe outlines the geography of the Arabian peninsula, the traditional origins of its peoples, and their religious beliefs before the coming of Islam. The next four chapters purport to describe the life and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad, while the eighth, ninth and tenth chapters are of a polemical nature, being respectively a vindication of the Prophet, of Islam, and of the Holy War as an Islamic institution.

The chapters concerning pre-Islamic Arabia and the career of the Prophet are a curious mixture of accurate information, of material which is unsound in itself, or has been misunderstood, and plain invention. In the published version of the book, Stubbe's sources are not shown, but they are indicated in the margin of one of the manuscripts in the British Museum. They fall broadly into two categories: recent Western editions of Arabic texts with supplementary material provided by the editors, and accounts by Western travellers and others of current conditions in Islamic lands. These are clearly two very unequal yokefellows, although for the most part Stubbe avoids the pitfall of reading back the beliefs and practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries into the early days of Islam. It is significant that he uses only such Arabic texts as had been published with a Latin translation (the common practice of orientalists in the seventeenth century): this is one of several indications that his personal knowledge of Arabic was negligible or non-existent. Living when he did, he could call on few authors in either category, but it may be said that he showed a sound instinct in choosing his sources—better for example than Prideaux, who wrote not very long afterwards.

The authority from whom most of the factual material is

drawn is Stubbe's older contemporary, Edward Pococke (1604–91), the leading Arabist in seventeenth-century England. Pococke stood at the opposite pole of religious and political opinion from Stubbe. A Laudian—indeed a protégé of Laud, who had founded the Chair of Arabic at Oxford for him—he remained a staunch royalist and Anglican throughout the Interregnum. Deprived of his professorships both of Arabic and Hebrew (to the latter of which he had been nominated by Charles I in 1648), and of his canonry at Christ Church (which was wanted for Dr. Peter French, brother-in-law of Oliver Cromwell and father-in-law of the future Archbishop Tillotson), he eschewed controversy and lived, not wholly undisturbed, in his Berkshire rectory of Childrey.

Pococke, who was a most accomplished scholar, published several editions of texts, one of which was of outstanding importance in the development of English (and European) Arabism. Entitled *Specimen historiae Arabum*, it was an extract from an Arabic chronicle by Bar Hebraeus, a thirteenth-century Christian author, dealing with pre-Islamic Arabia, the Prophet, and Islam. The extract is provided with a Latin translation and supplemented by over 300 pages of extremely erudite Latin notes, amplifying the information given in the text from Pocock's own extensive reading. The *Specimen* in effect provided seventeenth-century scholars with a handbook to the antiquities of Arabia and the religion of Islam. It is not surprising that extensive passages in Stubbe's book are paraphrased, sometimes even fully translated, from Pococke's notes, although there are places where Stubbe has misunderstood or misrepresented his original.

While Stubbe's account of pre-Islamic Arabia is largely based on Pococke's material, his biography of the Prophet includes a good deal which is not authentic, and which I suspect is partly the product of Stubbe's own imagination. Muḥammad as a young man is described as serving as a mercenary under Abū Bakr (subsequently the first caliph), who is wrongly styled his uncle.

'Here' says Stubbe, 'he accomplish'd himself in civil and military Prudence, and withal discovered the divisions and weaknesses of the Christians.'<sup>20</sup>

The most remarkable addition that Stubbe makes to the traditional biography of the Prophet occurs in Chapter V, where Muḥammad, installed at Medina, decides to send an embassy to 'the Nation of the Agarens, a warlike and potent people living thereabouts.' 'Agarens,' i.e. descendants of Hagar, was a medieval European synonym for the Arabs.<sup>21</sup> The ethnic distinction thus implied between the Prophet's followers at Medina and the Arabs is wholly unwarranted. Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law, 'Alī (much later, the fourth caliph) is imagined as the leader of this fictitious mission, which Stubbe describes in the following words:

'Let us then fancy the galant Aly mounted upon as good a horse as that which he used afterwards, call'd Duldall, . . . with a small but brave troop of Moslemin, martial in their aspect, grave in their Speech and Carriage, exact in their Discipline and obedience, armed not for show but service, and tho' they valued their Tulipants as Diadems, yet they more esteemed the goodness of their swords by which they seem'd to designe for each man a Royalty. Such was their Reverence to their Commander that one would have thought they had been all slaves. . . .'<sup>22</sup>

This little vignette is surely drawn from some recent traveller's description of Ottoman janissaries, for we are told 'that they carried in their Standard the Lunulet or half Moon.'<sup>23</sup>

The supposed embassy to the Agarens is a literary device by which Stubbe conveys information about the ritual practices of Islam, and (by means of a speech put in the mouth of 'Alī)

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<sup>20</sup> *Mahometanism*, 74 (78–9).

<sup>21</sup> The term seems to have come into use since the more usual 'Saracen' was (by a false etymology) regarded as implying a claim to descent from Sarah. The Saracens are depicted by Stubbe as a distinct people who were also visited and converted by 'Alī.

<sup>22</sup> *Mahometanism*, 93 (98–99).

<sup>23</sup> *Mahometanism*, 94 (100).



summarizes Muslim doctrine on the identity of Islam with the religion of Abraham. 'These discourses,' says Stubbe, 'raised in the Agarens not only a great Attention, but in an instant seem'd to have gain'd them to the party of the Prophet'.<sup>24</sup> A meal being served, the Muslims' abstinence from wine particularly impressed the Agarens, and an after-dinner speech by 'Alī finally won them over. In due course, he returned to Medina 'with a numerous train of Volunteers, who came of their own Accord to attend and guard the Prophet'.<sup>25</sup>

I will not pause upon the details of the two following chapters, which describe the later years of the Prophet, his battles and his death. Here as elsewhere, Stubbe elaborates information derived from Pococke and other sources to produce a picture of Muḥammad as a resolute and victorious war-leader. In Chapter VIII Stubbe sums up his favourable view of the Prophet, as a man

'furnish'd with all the qualifications requisite in a person cut out for great Atcheivements and equally qualified for Actions of Warr, or the Arts of Peace and civil Government.'<sup>26</sup>

He passes on to challenge and confute what he calls 'the fabulous inventions of the Christians concerning him and his religion,'—the legend that Muḥammad was indoctrinated by a Nestorian monk and a Jew, that a tame pigeon was feigned to be the Holy Ghost, that his tomb was suspended between two loadstones, and the rest of the trivia bred by religious hatred and political apprehension.

In his last two chapters, Stubbe proceeds to a reassessment of the doctrines and institutions of Islam. Frequently he defends the rationality of Muslim teaching, which he summarizes in the following words:

'This is the sume of Mahometan Religion, on the one hand not clogging Men's Faith with the necessity of

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<sup>24</sup> *Mahometanism*, 103 (109).

<sup>25</sup> *Mahometanism*, 118 (125).

<sup>26</sup> *Mahometanism*, 142 (150).



beleiving a number of abstruse Notions which they cannot comprehend, and which are often contrary to the dictates of Reason and comon Sense; nor on the other hand loading them with the performance of many troublesom, expensive, and superstitious Ceremonies, yet enjoyning a due observance of Religious Worship, as the surest Method to keep Men in the bounds of their Duty both to God and Man.’<sup>27</sup>

In discussing the five Pillars of the Faith which are the criteria of adherence to the Community of Islam, Stubbe presses a rationalizing justification. The Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Fast of Ramaḍān were, he asserts, enjoined by the Prophet ‘upon a prudent foresight that they would be of great use in a military Empire such as he designed’.<sup>28</sup> The prescription of almsgiving, too, ‘was political in its Original, . . . a kind of Grecian levelling Law’.<sup>29</sup> The five daily ritual prayers are also seen as a prudential institution. Other practices associated with Islam, which had been regarded as scandalous by Christians, are similarly defended. Polygamy and concubinage, besides being ‘most ancient and inveterate practices in the ancient World,’ were

‘exceedingly subservient to the multiplying of subjects which are the Sinews of Empire, and therefore prudential. They were requisite upon another Score, because in the East and South it is observed that there are far more Women than Men.’<sup>30</sup>

The last chapter is mainly devoted to an apologia for the Holy War and a vindication of Muḥammad’s own attitude in this matter. He regards it as ‘a vulgar Opinion that “Mahomet propagated his Doctrine by the Sword”.’ His defence is that:

‘It is very true that Mahomet did levy warr in Arabia, but it was with the object of restoring an old Religion, not to introduce a new one.’<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Mahometanism*, 166 (177).

<sup>28</sup> *Mahometanism*, 169 (180).

<sup>29</sup> *Mahometanism*, 170 (181).

<sup>30</sup> *Mahometanism*, 174 (185).

<sup>31</sup> *Mahometanism*, 180 (192).

In any case, Christians have justified war as a means to conversion, and (in a contemporary reference),

‘These and sundry other Titles of Warr are treated of and maintained by the Divines who write concerning the Spanish Rights over the Indians.’<sup>32</sup>

These are perhaps somewhat specious arguments, and Stubbe is on better ground historically when he says that ‘the Mahometans did propagate their Empire, but not their Religion, by force of Arms’,<sup>33</sup> since the Jews and Christians had a tolerated status as protected persons under Muḥammad and the caliphs, his successors. He is bold enough to allude to his own times:

‘the vulgar Greeks live in a better Condition under the Turk at present then they did under their own Emperours, when there were perpetual murders practised on their Princes, and tyranny over the People; but they are now secure from Injury if they pay their Taxes. And it is indeed more the Interest of the Princes & Nobles, then of the People, which at present keeps all Europe from submitting to the Turks.’<sup>34</sup>

His conclusion is

‘that when we say that the Religion of Mahomet was propagated by the Sword, we must understand it only as a Consequence of their Victories, and not that they forced Men by slaughters and Murders into their Opinion.’<sup>35</sup>

### III

It now remains to consider the significance of this book. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were, for western Europe, a period of interest in, first, the Arabic language, and secondly, the religion, history and institutions of the Muslim

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<sup>32</sup> *Mahometanism*, 181 (193).

<sup>33</sup> *Mahometanism*, 182 (194).

<sup>34</sup> *Mahometanism*, 183 (195).

<sup>35</sup> *Mahometanism*, 188 (201).

peoples. Biblical scholars were well aware of the relationship between Arabic and Hebrew. Commercial and diplomatic links with the Ottoman Empire (which in the early sixteenth century came to dominate the Arab lands) both offered facilities for travel and residence in Muslim territory, and made an understanding of Islam a matter of immediate political relevance. The collection of manuscripts by Western scholars at last made possible the establishment of Islamic studies on a sound foundation.

English participation in these developments was somewhat tardy. Admittedly, in 1524 Wynkyn de Worde published a lecture given at Cambridge by the King's chaplain, Robert Wakfeld, 'concerning the praises and utility of the three languages, Arabic, Chaldee and Hebrew,' but it was not until the end of the century that the first Englishman in modern times to have a scholarly knowledge of Arabic made his appearance. This was William Bedwell (1562-1632), Edward Pococke's teacher. In 1634, Archbishop Laud founded the Chair of Arabic at Oxford for Pococke—his act having been anticipated (and no doubt stimulated) by the London draper, Thomas Adams, who in 1632 agreed to pay an annual stipend of £40 to his fellow-Shropshireman, Abraham Wheelocke, to lecture in Arabic at Cambridge. At the same time, Cambridge obtained the nucleus of its oriental collection, by receiving from the widowed Duchess of Buckingham the manuscripts which her husband had purchased from the library of the Dutch Arabist, Thomas Erpenius. The collection at Oxford was built up by Pococke, purchasing for Laud and for himself, and in 1634 each ship of the Levant Company returning to England was required to bring back a Persian or Arabic manuscript.

The work of the Arabic scholars in Christian Europe inevitably and in the long run challenged those traditional views of Islam and the Prophet which had been formed and elaborated in the conflicts and the stresses of the Middle Ages. The scholars were not, of course, free from prejudice: Pococke,

for example, goes to some trouble to refute the claim that the coming of the Prophet is foretold in the Bible. On the other hand he quickly dismisses two old fables—that of the Prophet's suspended tomb, and that of the tame pigeon. But whereas Pococke is content to correct an inveterate error by a passing comment in a Latin footnote, Stubbe denounces at length and in plain English both the fictions and their propagators. Stubbe is a controversialist, not an academic historian: *The rise and progress of Mahometanism* is erudite without being scholarly.

In these respects, Stubbe resembles his more successful contemporary, Prideaux, so that the work of one is, so to speak, a mirror-image of that of the other—Stubbe vindicating, and Prideaux casting obloquy on, Islam and the Prophet. There is a further resemblance, in that neither writer was essentially interested in Islam. As the title of Prideaux's book shows, he was really concerned with the current religious situation in England: in his own words:

‘Have we not Reason to fear, that God may in the same Manner raise up some *Mahomet* against us for our utter Confusion. . . . And by what the *Socinian*, the *Quaker*, and the *Deist* begin to advance in this Land, we may have Reason to fear, that Wrath hath some Time since gone forth from the Lord for the Punishment of these our Iniquities and Gainsayings, and that the Plague is already begun among us.’<sup>36</sup>

While Prideaux uses his view of Islamic history as a weapon to defend Christian orthodoxy, Stubbe interprets his material in the opposite sense, and his first two chapters indicate that the true object of his polemic is not so much the traditional Christian view of Islam as the current Christian view of Christianity. In structure and language, indeed, the *Rise and progress of Mahometanism* shows a distinct kinship with that other anonymous and (as Wood called it) ‘most pestilent

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<sup>36</sup> Prideaux, *Life of Mahomet*, 8th edn., London, 1723; ‘To the Reader’, vii–viii.



book,' *A light shining out of darkness*. Two editions of this work appeared in 1659, the latter, a revised and augmented text, being reprinted as a third edition in 1699. It appears to have been the result of collaboration between Stubbe and Vane,<sup>37</sup> and was cast in the form of queries with answers displaying the same kind of miscellaneous and wide-ranging erudition that we find in the *Rise and progress of Mahometanism*. The tendency of the book is to excite doubts about church order, and, like the *Rise and progress of Mahometanism*, it indicates the differences between the primitive Church and that of the seventeenth century. A good many pages are devoted to investigating the legality of tithes, while in a series of disturbing queries concerning universities occurs the following:

'Whether the Institution of Doctoral Degrees be not Novel? And accounted Antichristian by the Reformed Churches in Scotland, France, Holland, Switzerland, and the Calvinist in High-Germany? . . .'<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the most significant portion of the book, however, is an apology for the Quakers, who had recently been denounced by John Owen. Their tenets are shown to be fundamentally the same as Owen's, they are defended against the imputation of fanaticism, and the writer goes so far as to say:

'As for my part, since I am not sensible of the *Convictions* or *Emotions* of the Spirit under which another lies, so I dare not condemn the *Quaker*, whether he reprove openly, or walk naked through the Streets, denouncing Woes and Menaces: It is a sufficient Argument for me, that what God bids, is not undecent.'<sup>39</sup>

In all this, it seems to me, we have the same pattern of ideas and attitudes as in the *Rise and progress of Mahometanism*, but in the latter work there is a turn of the screw. Doubts are

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<sup>37</sup> Falconer Madan, *Oxford books*, 3, *Oxford literature*, 1651-1680, Oxford, 1931, 96-97.

<sup>38</sup> *A light shining out of darkness*, 3rd edn., London, 1699, 197.

<sup>39</sup> *A light shining out of darkness*, 121.

suggested, not only about church order, but about the accepted and orthodox christology. The writer defends, not a weak sect which, however radical and unconventional, was Christian in its origins and inspiration, but the powerful Muslim community and its Prophet, whom for a millennium Christians had viewed as a precursor of Antichrist. It is hardly surprising that this work, both more extreme and more outspoken than *A light shining out of darkness*, remained without name of author and circulated only in manuscript for well over two centuries. Neither a serious contribution to orientalism, nor an influential vindication of Islam, *The Rise and progress of Mahometanism* shared the climate of opinion of the age in which it was conceived, reflecting as it does the religious and theological exuberance of the Interregnum.

At the same time it anticipates, although crudely and fitfully, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. All history is secular history: Stubbe asks of his reader,

“if the Authors I make use of be good, the Citations true, and the Facts certain and indisputable, if the progress of Christianity be such as is conformable to the constant course of human Affairs in such great Revolutions, that then he would not oppose me with discourses of miraculous Accidents, unimaginable effusions of the Holy Ghost, and such like, which no reason can comprehend nor Example paralel.”<sup>40</sup>

For the concept of the uniqueness of sacred history, he substitutes a comparison of Christianity, Judaism and Islam in terms which to his contemporaries must have seemed very bold:

‘I have often reflected upon the exceptions made by the Christians against the Alcoran, and find them to be no other then what may be urged with the same strength against our Bible.’<sup>41</sup>

Again, referring to the biblical texts interpreted by Muslims as foretelling the coming of Muḥammad :

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<sup>40</sup> *Mahometanism*, 49 (52).

<sup>41</sup> *Mahometanism*, 159 (169–70).

‘... the Texts above recited seem at least as plainly to point at Mahomet and to be fulfilled in him, as any of those which the Christians pick out for their turn, and which they pretend do prophesy concerning Christ can be thought to relate to him; for upon these the Jews do put a quite different Interpretation, and in many cases seem to have reason on their side, as any one may see that will give himself the trouble of perusing their books.’<sup>42</sup>

I may appropriately close with a sentence which may recall to you another by a far greater sceptical historian of the following century.

‘When Christianity became generally received, it introduced with it a general Inundation of Barbarism and Ignorance, which over-run all places where it prevailed.’<sup>43</sup>

Should we not set this beside Gibbon’s epigram on the theme of his *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, ‘I have described the triumph of barbarism and religion’?<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Mahometanism*, 163–4 (174).

<sup>43</sup> *Mahometanism*, 57 (61).

<sup>44</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J. B. Bury), London, 1920, VII, 308.





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